

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. In a computer system that supports real-time communication between a user of the computer system and one or more contacts, a method of making one or more user interfaces for real time communication less intrusive by automatically adjusting the one or more user interfaces based on the user's level of interaction, the method comprising acts of:

displaying an intermediate representation of a user interface for real-time communication, the intermediate representation including a text input box and at least a portion of a received real-time message;

upon receiving an increased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically enlarging the intermediate representation of the user interface to an enlarged representation appropriate for the increased level of interaction, wherein the enlarged representation includes the text input box; and

upon receiving a decreased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically reducing the intermediate representation of the user interface to a reduced representation appropriate for the decreased level of interaction.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the reduced representation includes the text input box.

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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the acts of automatically enlarging and reducing the intermediate interface occur without an explicit input to reduce or enlarge the intermediate representation.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the enlarged representation corresponds to a maximized state for the user interface, and wherein the intermediate representation of the user interface corresponds to a minimized state for the user interface.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising an act of, upon automatically reducing the intermediate representation to a reduced representation, displaying a message to indicate where the reduced representation is located.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the increased level of interaction comprises one or more of hovering over the intermediate representation and clicking a pointing device on the intermediate representation.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the increased level of interaction comprises typing text in the text input box, and wherein the enlarge representation comprises a send option, the method further comprising an act of automatically reducing the enlarged representation to the intermediate representation upon selection of the send option.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the intermediate representation of the user interface for real-time communication is displayed within a desktop bar.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the desktop bar also displays a contact representation, the method further comprising an act of, upon dragging and dropping a file object onto the contact representation, displaying a real-time message window that includes the file object and an option to send the file object to a contact associated with the contact representation.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising an act of highlighting the contact representation when one or more real-time messages are received from the contact associated with the contact representation.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein the contact representation comprises a user-definable icon.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the desktop bar displays one or more representations of one or more other user interfaces simultaneously with the intermediate representation of the user interface for real-time communication.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising an act of automatically reducing or enlarging the one or more representations of the one or more other user interfaces when the intermediate representation is automatically enlarged or reduced.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the one or more other user interfaces comprise one or more of a calendar object, a streaming video object, a streaming audio object, and a contact list.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the reduced representation of the user interface for real-time communication comprises a selectable icon.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the intermediate representation of the user interface for real-time communication is automatically reduced to the reduced representation, the method further comprising an act of displaying one or more received real-time messages adjacent the reduced representation for at least a predetermined period of time.

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17. In a computer system that supports real-time communication between a user of the computer system and one or more contacts, a method of simplifying user interaction with one or more real time communication user interfaces by adapting the one or more user interfaces to the user's activity level, the method comprising steps for:

monitoring user input directed to an initial representation of a user interface for real-time communication; and

automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface to the user's activity level based on the monitored user input, wherein adapting the initial representation produces at least one of an intermediate representation of the user interface that includes a text input box, a larger representation of the user interface that also includes the text input box, or a smaller representation of the user interface.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising an act of displaying at least one of the intermediate representation, the larger representation, and the smaller representation of the user interface for real-time communication.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the initial representation of the user interface for real-time communication comprises the intermediate representation, and wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface to the user's activity level based on the monitored user input includes acts of:

upon receiving an increased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically enlarging the intermediate representation of the user interface to an enlarged representation appropriate for the increased level of interaction that includes the text input box; and

upon receiving a decreased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically reducing the intermediate representation of the user interface to a reduced representation appropriate for the decreased level of interaction.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface to the user's activity level occurs without an explicit input to reduce or enlarge the initial representation.

21. The method of claim 17, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface comprises an act of enlarging the initial representation due to an increased activity level that comprises either a hover operation or a pointing device click on the initial representation.

22. The method of claim 17, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface comprises an act of reducing the initial representation of the user interface.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the initial representation of the user interface comprises the text input box and a send option, and wherein the act of reducing the initial representation of the user interface is in response to the user selecting the send option.

24. The method of claim 22, wherein the initial representation of the user interface is reduced to the smaller representation, the method further comprising a step for indicating where the smaller representation may be found.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the smaller representation comprises a conversation balloon.

26. The method of claim 17, further comprising an act of displaying the initial representation of the user interface for real-time communication in a desktop bar.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the desktop bar also displays one or more representations of one or more other user interfaces.

28. The method of claim 27, further comprising a step for automatically adapting the one or more other user interfaces to account for one of more size changes in the initial representation of the user interface for real-time communication.

29. For a computer system that supports real-time communication between a user of the computer system and one or more contacts, a computer program product comprising one or more computer readable media carrying computer executable instruction that implement a method of making one or more user interfaces for real time communication less intrusive by automatically adjusting the one or more user interfaces based on the user's level of interaction, the method comprising acts of:

displaying an intermediate representation of a user interface for real-time communication, the intermediate representation including a text input box and at least a portion of a received real-time message;
upon receiving an increased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically enlarging the intermediate representation of the user interface to an enlarged representation appropriate for the increased level of interaction, wherein the enlarged representation includes the text input box;
and
upon receiving a decreased level of interaction with the intermediate representation of the user interface, automatically reducing the intermediate representation of the user interface to a reduced representation appropriate for the decreased level of interaction.

30. The computer program product of claim 29, wherein the act of automatically reducing the intermediate interface occurs without an explicit input to reduce the intermediate representation.

31. The computer program product of claim 29, wherein the intermediate representation of the user interface corresponds to a minimized state for the user interface.

32. The computer program product of claim 29, further comprising an act of, upon automatically reducing the intermediate representation to a reduced representation, displaying a message to indicate where the reduced representation is located.

33. The computer program product of claim 32, wherein the reduced representation of the user interface for real-time communication comprises a selectable icon, the method further comprising an act of displaying one or more received real-time messages adjacent the selectable icon for at least a predetermined period of time.

34. The computer program product of claim 33, the method further comprising an act of enlarging the selectable icon representation of the user interface for real-time communication in response to the user interacting with the one or more real-time message displayed adjacent to the selectable icon.

35. The computer program product of claim 29, wherein the increased level of interaction comprises a text entry in the text input box.

36. The computer program product of claim 29,, wherein the intermediate representation of the user interface for real-time communication is displayed within a desktop bar. and wherein the desktop bar displays one or more representations of one or more other user interfaces simultaneously with the intermediate representation of the user interface for real-time communication, the method further. comprising an act of automatically reducing or enlarging the one or more representations of the one or more other user interfaces when the intermediate representation is automatically enlarged or reduced.

37. The computer program product of claim 36, wherein the one or more other user interfaces comprise one or more of a calendar object, a streaming video object, a streaming audio object, and a contact list.

38. For a computer system that supports real-time communication between a user of the computer system and one or more contacts, a computer program product comprising one or more computer readable media carrying computer executable instructions that implement a method of simplifying user interaction with one or more real time communication user interfaces by adapting the one or more user interfaces to the user's activity level, the method comprising steps for:

monitoring user input directed to an initial representation of a user interface for real-time communication; and

automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface to the user's activity level based on the monitored user input, wherein adapting the initial representation produces at least one of an intermediate representation of the user interface that includes a text input box, a larger representation of the user interface that also includes the text input box, or a smaller representation of the user interface.

39. The computer program product of claim 38, the method further comprising an act of displaying the initial representation of the user interface.

40. The computer program product of claim 38, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface to the user's activity level occurs without an explicit input for reducing or enlarging the initial representation.

41. The computer program product of claim 38, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface comprises an act of enlarging the initial representation due to an increased activity level that comprises either a hover operation or a pointing device click on the initial representation.

42. The computer program product of claim 38, wherein the step for automatically adapting the initial representation of the user interface comprises an act of reducing the initial representation of the user interface.

43. The computer program product of claim 42, wherein the initial representation of the user interface comprises the text input box and a send option, and wherein the act of reducing the initial representation of the user interface is in response to the user selecting the send option.

44. The computer program product of claim 42, wherein the initial representation of the user interface is reduced to the smaller representation, the method further comprising a step for indicating where the smaller representation is located.

45. The computer program product of claim 38, further comprising an act of displaying the initial representation of the user interface for real-time communication in a desktop bar that also displays one or more representations of one or more other user interfaces.

46. The computer program product of claim 45, further comprising a step for automatically adapting the one or more other user interfaces to account for changes in the initial representation of the user interface for real-time communication.

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